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Covering Apache and Navajo Counties and the Northern Arizona Communities of Greer, St. Johns, Eager, Pinetop-Lakeside, Show Low and Heber-Overgaard

Forum promotes fire codes

PAYSON, AZ - Officials from the Arizona State Fire Marshal's Office and the Arizona State Forestry Division, along with the Arizona Insurance Council, advised more than 60 local elected, staff and fire officials from across Arizona of the benefits of wildland urban interface fire codes at a July 16 forum.

Phil Mele, Arizona state fire marshal and a co-host for the WUI Fire Codes Forum in Payson, told the gathering that "fire codes are based on knowledge gained from the tragic realities of past fires." He noted that "a fire code, when adopted by a community, has proven to provide for better life safety of citizens and minimize property loss. The WUI Fire Codes are no different. They can improve and better provide for the fire life safety of citizens, their property and the entire community in the unique environment of the wildland urban interface."

Currently, there are only five communities in Arizona that have adopted the WUI Fire Codes: Flagstaff, Prescott, Groom Creek, Pima County Mountain Areas and Sedona fire districts.

Mele and Vicki Christiansen, state forester, are promoting the fire codes in targeted communities in the state, specifically the cities of Payson, Pinetop-Lakeside and Williams, the fire districts of Heber/Overgaard, Greer and Summit and the counties of Apache, Coconino and Yavapai.

The forum reached out to dozens of Arizona wildland communities with education that WUI Fire Codes reduce the burn rate of buildings and the costs of fighting fires.

Local officials attending the forum included Larry Stephenson of the Eastern Arizona Counties Organization; Dick Bruneau, chairman of the Apache County Forest Management Commission, Greer Fire District; Kirk Webb, fire marshal of the Lakeside Fire Department; Herb Frontier, code enforcement officer of the Town of Pinetop-Lakeside; and Don Berry of White Mountain Stewardship Monitoring Board.

The codes also call for the use of fire resistant materials and building specifications and provide criteria for creating a "defensible space" around structures.

State Forester Vicki Christiansen, also a co-host of the forum, described Arizona as being actively engaged in restoring forest health. Part of that effort is to engage with local officials on critical issues associated with forest health, wildfire awareness and public safety.

"Local communities are key to implementing WUI Fire Codes that can mitigate wildfire risks. Federal, state and local forest and fire officials are here to partner with communities to address that vital role," she said.

Ron Williams, executive director of the Arizona Insurance Council, said that property and casualty insurers in the state support expanding WUI Fire Codes.

"When we can reduce losses and save lives and homes by adopting reasonable, proven standards, we as insurers can be more competitive and that benefits policyholders in many ways."

The WUI Fire Codes Forum was sponsored by the Arizona Insurance Council with support from Institute for Business and Home Safety, State Farm Insurance Companies and the National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies.

The Arizona Insurance Council is a non-profit organization supported by member companies in the property-casualty insurance business.

